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## A CONSIDERATION OF GEOGRAPHY TEXTS

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No other elementary textbook costs the publishers so much to make ready for the market as does the school geography; and none comes in for a greater share of abuse, by teachers and schoolmen generally. If the teaching force of the country really know what they want in this particular, they have never succeeded in making it clear. The criticisms in the main have been iconoclastic rather than suggestive. The present paper, while frankly stating a personal view-point, will attempt, in the end to contribute something on the constructive side.

### DO WE NEED A TEXT AT ALL?

The belief is held by many educationists that if our grade teachers were properly equipped in training and scholarship, there would be no place for the textbook. We have set up, in our pedagogical shrine, an ideal teacher, of high conceptions, high attainments, and high mettle, to whom we conceive the textbook merely as an impediment, prescribed by an undiscerning superintendent.

That this is a dangerous fallacy, however, it requires but a glance over the situation to show. Not all initiative is dependable, and not all the roads of individuality lead to Rome. Our profession is full of people with crochets and hobbies, and perhaps you and I are among the number. Too many of us poke hairpins into the course of study, to see the wheels go round, or possibly to make them turn the other way. Occasionally there arises one who can blaze a new trail, but there are not many. For the rank and file of us tradition is by far the safest working platform; and with it under our feet we in the long run render our best service. So far as geography-teaching, at least, is concerned, no scheme superseding the textbook has ever been offered which has proven,

in the estimate of schoolmen at large, acceptably inclusive and exclusive.

The textbook appears needful also for a diametrically opposite reason. It not only answers as a corrective against crochets and distorted perspective, but, on the other hand, it sustains, in a fair degree of continuity, the work of the great army of teachers who are troubled neither with crochets nor perspective. In a word, it is the only safeguard we have against the chaos of genius, on the one hand, and the barren wastes of indifference, on the other. Those upon whom devolves the task of shaping the materia and methods of elementary teaching must ever be conscious that they are purveyors, not to a few geniuses and zealots, but to a great body of average toilers, tolerably alike, and numbering, in our own country, nearly four hundred thousand head. Viewed in this practical light, the textbook, be its failings what they may, appears as a veritable life-buoy in the deep.

#### THE CHARACTER OF EXISTING TEXTS

A painstaking examination of all the school geographies now offered for sale leads to the conclusion that, in a large way, all geography texts are the same texts. The authors have been too respectful of tradition to launch out into any marked deviations looking to a radical improvement in geography-teaching. Notwithstanding the broad claims of each new prospectus, all of the contemporary texts (with the two exceptions noted<sup>1</sup>), together with their predecessors for the past seventy-five years, are seen to be virtually repetitions, one of the next. There is a relieving variation in cover design and preface, but there the differences virtually stop short. Indeed, there are certainly six contemporary geographies (three by the same house) which are so nearly identical in plan and content as utterly to nonplus the superintendent who would choose a text. Only the publishers themselves could supply the reason for this duplication.

This pervading likeness greatly facilitates comparison. Taking them as they stand, there would seem to be five particulars upon which to base a choice among the current texts. These are

<sup>1</sup> The Tarr and McMurry series is a partial, and the Chisholm and Leete scheme a complete, exception to this statement, as later noted.

(1) make-up, (2) maps, (3) illustrations, (4) content, (5) method.

1. *Make-up*.—The claims made for the novel make-up of the Tarr and McMurry geographies are in part justified. The reduced size<sup>2</sup> proves a convenience, and a test of two years' wear and tear in the schoolroom shows these books to have a superior endurance. The one point in which the small page is at a disadvantage lies in the impaired value of the maps, despite the claims made to the contrary.

A more important matter, in which the Tarr and McMurry series scores an advantage is the psychology of the printed page. Certainly the most serious criticism to be made upon textbook make-up is the confused medley which the usual page presents to the reader's baffled eye. Opening a Redway at random (and it might as readily be a Frye, Butler, Morton, Roddy, or other), I find (p. 86) five fonts of letters disposed in a very *mêlée* of typography, and located in odd nooks amid the jumble of illustrations. This page is quite typical of those in any of the large-form geographies. The Tarr and McMurry books also yield to this fondness for kaleidoscopic type effects, but the small page and single column make the results less disastrous to the reader's concentration.

Finally, the table of contents is as available in the Tarr and McMurry as it has always been unavailable in other texts.

2. *Maps*.—With regard to political maps it is argued that the standard reference maps of the old-line textbooks are unduly crowded with names of unimportant towns, provinces, etc., which are not germane to the content of the geography lesson, and therefore serve only to complicate the map without rendering any return service; and that by a wholesale elimination of these cartographic minutiae a result is attained which better serves the end in view. It is worthy of consideration, however, that in the typical schoolroom the text geography must serve also as an atlas, whenever an atlas becomes necessary. All the geographical references arising in the history lesson, the literature lesson, and

<sup>2</sup> A reversion to Jedidiah Morse, whose excellent geography flourished a century ago.

the daily news must have recourse to this book, in default of a more richly informational source. We have then to decide whether the extreme denudation of the political map is of sufficient import, psychologically, to offset its diminished value for purposes of general reference.

A comparison of leading texts suggests that in the Tarr and McMurry series this elimination has been too sweeping, and that the maps are thereby lessened in usefulness. It is true that the detail maps make up for the omissions in the continents. But it is a matter of much importance to locate a given feature upon the map in hand instead of searching further for it. Some of the other texts have been a trifle more conservative in this matter of eliminations, and the result is in their favor.

Whatever may be the decision upon this point, there is another which must not be confused with it. After having determined just how far the simplifying of the political map is advisable, we must not, in the same act, denude the physical map of what at first thought may be set down as worthless details. I refer to minor lakes and rivers, descriptive elevations, and deviations of coast-line. Unfortunately, a theory has gained some foothold that by robbing a map of its descriptive coast-lines, and by omitting the unnameworthy but richly descriptive small rivers, lakes, and minor relief, we have served some pedagogical principle. By the same logic we should have to expunge the stars from the firmament, that the pupil might with greater facility locate and identify the moon.

Of the texts examined, Morton's on the whole, has the most desirable maps. To begin with, each continent is introduced by a full-page physical map, followed by a political map with the physical features underlying. This initial separateness of the physical map is of some moment in a step-by-step, or cumulative, plan of teaching. Also in Morton the physical maps have a more realistic relief than those of any other text. These maps use the pictorial, or light-and-shade, device for mountains with a surpassing effect. It is used also by the Tarr and McMurry, but with less success. In the latter its quality varies from the moderately effective relief in Fig. 177, First Book, to a faint and unde-

scriptive stain in Fig. 183. Compare either with Morton. The Howell reliefs, for which much is claimed in the Tarr and McMurry, are fraught with significance to the tutored eye of the physiographer, but they are utterly without grasp on the imagination of the child. The Howell marine relief, p. 2, Second Book, is an example of a (to the child) quite meaningless and uninviting illustration.

Maps for school children should afford some sort of transition from simon-pure pictures to the aggregations of symbols which carry a message to the eye of the physiographer or engineer. Redway's maps use the hachure symbol for mountains, and his relief, while valuable reference for the teacher, is unintelligible to any but mature students. The black-and-white reliefs of Frye vary from the mechanically effective United States on p. 68 to the unspeakable creations in the Supplement, pp. ii-iv. But even the best of these reproductions from photographs of wax or putty models are very barren of that genuine suggestion of a teeming area of land. Structural models have scant effect in stimulating the child's imagery, and photographs of the same must have even less. These black-and-white reliefs can be given a superlative value, however, if they are *drawn*, thus receiving the suggestive touch of the artist's hand.

Frye's political maps are superimposed over the old-fashioned hachure, or symbolic relief. His colored physical maps, are equal to Redway's, inferior to Morton's and smaller than either. The picture maps in Frye, however, are a very valuable revival of an old device, and will be considered later.

Compare<sup>3</sup> Morton, p. 48, with Frye, p. 65, or Redway, p. 44, or Tarr and McMurry, Second Book, p. 121. These Morton maps appear to be the most richly descriptive that have ever been produced. Compare Morton, p. 60, (New England), or p. 89 (California), with the corresponding maps in Redway, pp. 60, 88, or Frye, pp. 91, 117, or Tarr and McMurry, Second Book, pp. 124, 281. In the Tarr and McMurry the transition from the pictorially conceived earth through several intermediate stages to the detail maps of political areas is to be commended.

<sup>3</sup> In each case the advanced book.

3. *Illustrations.*—Since the legitimate use of pictures is to enhance the descriptive effect of the text, presumably the highest artistic skill will give the most richly descriptive illustration. But we have allowed ourselves to fall into the curious belief that the camera lens cannot lie; and that therefore the most direct product of photography is necessarily the most descriptive picture. On second thought, however, it is apparent that a photograph is, in the general rule, the least descriptive of all pictures; and that the half-toning process of reproduction is very apt to reduce its descriptive value still more. The photographic lens in average hands exercises no selective power; neither does it lay that intelligent stress upon the right spot which only the *bona fide* illustrator can secure. Pen-and-ink, woodcuts, and wash drawings cost more than reproduced photographs, but they are of incomparably greater descriptive value.

Redway's and Frye's geographies use woodcuts throughout. These pictures are satisfactorily descriptive. The Morton pictures are half-toned, but they are reproduced from drawings, not photographs, and the result is surprisingly brilliant and descriptive. On the whole, they are superior to Frye's and have something the advantage over Redway's.<sup>4</sup> But the animal and landscape picture-maps of Frye's are peculiar to that series and cannot be too highly indorsed, either as a teaching device or as to workmanship.<sup>5</sup>

The Tarr and McMurry illustrations are half-toned from photographs. Even with matchless workmanship, the outcome of this combination is always lacking in virility. But somewhere in the process the work has been ill-done, and the results are, in the main, muddy, dim, and undescriptive. These half-tone photos are without that piquancy of light-and-dark and atmosphere, which gives to woodcuts and pen-drawings their descriptive quality. Turning to p. 5, Tarr and McMurry, First Book, this distinction is clearly seen. Compare the pen-drawing, Fig. 4, with Fig. 3, on the page opposite. Or, compare the iceberg, on p. 193, with the icebergs in Redway, Advanced, p. 19, or the

<sup>4</sup> *Vide* "Gathering Cinchona," p. 114, Morton.

<sup>5</sup> See Frye, pp. 44 ff.

Elementary, p. 9; or Morton's Advanced, p. 24, or the Elementary, p. 69.

4. *Content*.—In the matters of arrangement and content, the Redway and Morton geographies are remarkably alike, and appear to have been built in a common mold. In the table below it will be seen that these two books give almost page for page the same attention to the various divisions of subject-matter. Frye elaborates considerably in the direction of physiography and United States. He is unduly scant on foreign *civilized* areas, notably other North America and Europe. Tarr and McMurry, on the contrary, while dealing more abundantly with all the divisions, are especially attentive to Europe; this is a point of considerable value in the latter book. It is the German policy to teach the young subjects of the Kaiser a great deal about the Fatherland and its dependencies, and as little as is convenient about the rest of the world. This inbreeding of the national ideal and ideas is observable in an even greater development in China. The true fruitage is slow in revealing itself, but it comes at last. It has come to China, and it will come to every nation that deliberately narrows the outlook of its school children. No geography course is justifiable which tends to emphasize rather than correct the provincialism which no community ever wholly escapes. We cannot afford to teach any geography that does not, in a generous sense, provide or imply a substitute for world-wide travel. Still, on the other hand, such instruction must not crowd a fairly intensive study of the home country. Considering the fact that the elementary school claims eight thousand hours of the pupil's life, there should be ample room for both.

During the latter part of the last century an avalanche of physiography descended upon the elementary school, from higher institutions, and invested its course of study. This has not influenced the textbooks, however, as much as might have been expected. The physiographic minutiae of earth structure occupies ten pages of Frye's Advanced book and twenty of the Elementary; of Redway's, somewhat more in the Advanced, and considerably less in the Elementary. Morton's contains less than Frye's by half in the Advanced, and none at all in the Elementary.



Tarr and McMurry devote an equivalent of seven of the large pages to this material in their Second Book, and the first eighty pages in the First Book. But in the latter case the material is skilfully made local to the average child's experience, and each unit of thought is summarized in a pregnant sentence immediately following and printed in italics.

NUMBER OF PAGES DEVOTED TO EACH DIVISION

	General Geog- raphy and Principles	United States	Other North America	South America	Europe	Asia	Africa	Australia, etc.	Appendix
Redway .....	41	43	15	10	18	14	6	4	26
Morton .....	39	44	22	10	20	14	8	6	17
Frye .....	65	63	12	9	16	15	10	5	8
T. & McM. 2d and 3d books * .....	57	80	16	14	55	16	12	10	16
Roddy .....	19	42	14	10	20	14	9	7	4

\* Figures corrected for difference in size of page.

5. *Method*.—There seems good reason to concur with Tarr and McMurry in their argument abandoning the uniform map scale—more particularly as no textbook has ever succeeded in maintaining such a scale. And, as someone has said, it should be a part of the pupil's training early to recognize and accept scale variation in maps, since in a multitude of his experiences he will encounter it.

The reaction from our late over-attention to physiography points toward an increased regard for descriptive geography, especially on the human side. The Tarr and McMurry books, by reason of their expansion, are the only series that can claim really to abandon the definition and desiccated statement and enter the task of description. The foregoing table discovers in the treatment of Europe a proportion of 55 to 16 in favor of Tarr and McMurry as against Frye. In spite of the more intensive treatment of the subject-matter, however, the Tarr and McMurry text is hardly less dry and didactic in its style than the others. It is descriptive in a purely informational way, but lacks the color and atmosphere which are a prime requisite in the best

geographical reading. A little more attention to the art of word-painting and a little less to the didactic ideal of causal relations would have lessened the necessity for supplementary reading.

The expedient summarizing of each topic is an important consideration. Of all the information imparted by the geography course, our expectation is that the pupil will forget the greater part. But in connection with each topic there is a nucleus, or generalized notion, which we hope he will remember. For the purpose of selecting from the topic this precipitate of essential matter, a topical summary is needful.

The Frye and Redway texts have come nearest to supplying this organic thing. Morton is wholly lacking in this respect, depending upon a fly-leaf suggestion (p. 4, *Advanced*, and another on p. 61) to fill the need. Tarr and McMurry have a valuable series of summaries in the First Book, but thereafter this plan is abandoned and no substitute furnished. The "Questions and Suggestions" are of great value as searching exploitations of the text, but they have no movement toward focusing upon a nucleus of essentials. The "Summary and Conclusion" appearing at the end of the Second Book, and substantially repeated at the close of the Third, is excellent, but too long delayed, and too remote from its immediate text to equal the value of an oft-recurring topical summary.

An important point in method is the treatment of characteristic, instead of political, areas in descriptive geography. The old-time textbook taught that Minnesota raises wheat; and as an entirely distinct and unrelated item the pupil memorized from another page that Dakota also raises wheat. Thus the simple organic units of description were chopped up into meaningless fragments by the "square-inch" method. Redway and Morton make a free use of this treatment still, contenting themselves with an exceedingly brief unifying survey at the opening of each areal study. Tarr and McMurry, on the contrary, make the areal treatment the substance of their scheme,<sup>6</sup> following it with a short square-inch treatment under the political headings. The necessary result is that in the one case the pupil's descriptive fund is received

<sup>6</sup> *Vide* Second Book, pp. 200-33; cf. Morton, pp. 81 ff., or Redway, pp. 80 ff.

in unorganized, unstable fragments that are soon lost to him; while in the other there is every reason to believe that he will retain an essential knowledge, organized and related in a few large, simple units.

Frye uses the areal treatment, but less intimately and intensively than do Tarr and McMurry.

In the Tarr and McMurry books the relation between physiographic processes and man's affairs is constantly brought to the pupil's attention. So much as a book alone may do in this direction appears here to have been accomplished; always excepting the photographic illustrations, which should be replaced by woodcuts or pen-drawings.

Having thus looked into existing texts upon their own grounds, it remains to consider in what respects and how radically the textbook of the future may profitably differ.

Those now in use fall into the fundamental error of trying to furnish a description of the earth and its inhabitants within the limits of a single volume. They are thus compelled to serve up their contents in a highly concentrated form. Their desiccated statements are at once barren of imagery for the pupil, and unwieldly as a course of study. In a high endeavor to be both a syllabus for the teacher and a book of content for the pupil, they fall short of achieving both aims. They are, in any real sense, neither textbooks nor descriptions; and they are not easily adapted to any known scheme of teaching. Our present question is, therefore, not as to whether the task, within its limits, has been well done, but whether, such as it is, it has ever been worth the doing.

The Tarr and McMurry *Geography* is a departure in that a determined—we may say heroic—effort has been made to expand the text into actual content. The result, while certainly an improvement, in the end simply goes to clinch the conclusion which was already obvious: that a satisfactory treatment of geography can never be compassed in one volume, be it never so bulky, and be it in one or several parts. The Tarr and McMurry series is a strenuous and thorough exploitation of a blind alley—

a blind alley into which competing texts entered and remained much nearer the entrance.

A *bona fide* geography text will have two essential parts; one of these an atlas, made up of maps and such tables of statistics as are needful in ordinary reference; the other, a minutely specific course of study, for the teacher's guidance. Then, in addition to this textbook, there will be added, in a complementary relation, a copious fund of geographical readings, such as fifty volumes could scarce include. Fortunately, this complementary material is to a great extent already at hand, in the splendid supply of geographical readers lately appearing. The list is far too large to enumerate here, but the Carpenter Readers and the Youths' Companion books are typical of the best. We must not, however, confuse these highly available books with the flood of juvenile adventure, which has the consistency only of foam, and leaves no precipitate.

The proposed textbook itself is seen in prototype in the Longman's Atlas, taken together with the Chisholm and Leete handbook. 'Unfortunately, these books, as a unit, have not been promoted by their publishers with the zeal which they merit. Considered in combination with the complementary reading above mentioned, they certainly appear to point out a happy solution of the vexed problem of geography-teaching, so far as books are involved at all.